

LOUISVILLE COURIER-JOURNAL (KY.)
19 October 1978

Generosity helps redeem an affront to justice

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THE ACTIONS of the eight Iranians and three Americans who disrupted CIA Director Stansfield Turner's speech last April at the University of Kentucky were clearly out of bounds. But the harsh sentences and preposterously high appeal bonds imposed by a Lexington court in the case are even more difficult to justify. That's why it's gratifying that a Mount Sterling man, John T. Smiley, has done something to redeem the American reputation for fair play by posting the \$125,000 in bonds required for nine persons who remained in jail. The way is open for a higher court to make a more complete redemption by reducing or throwing out the district court sentences.

That's not to say that the behavior of those who demonstrated during the CIA director's speech should not have been penalized. The demonstration delayed Admiral Turner's speech for about 40 minutes; he was forced to pause several times while police removed demonstrators. Though there was no violence, there was an attempt to interfere with the rights of the speaker and of those who came to hear.

But the offense didn't warrant maximum or near-maximum penalties — fines of \$250 each and jail terms ranging from 45 to 90 days — given 10 offenders. The university didn't consider the incident serious enough even to consider suspending two UK students among the defendants.

The severity of the sentences for what amounted to disorderly conduct justified the Central Kentucky Civil Liberties Union's description of the action as "cruel and unusual punishment." Even less explicable was the court's setting \$15,000 bonds for the Iranians and \$5,000 for the Americans. Even the lower figure seems far out of keeping with the offense. It's hard to see anything but discrimination in the higher bonds.

The appeal can't rectify all the damage that's been done. But it can reaffirm American dedication to a single standard of justice.